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INFO ARAB ISRAELI COLLECTIVE
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C O N F I D E N T I A L JERUSALEM 000252

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NEA FOR FRONT OFFICE AND IPA FOR
WILLIAMS/SHAMPAINE/BELGRADE; NSC FOR ABRAMS/DORAN/WATERS

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [ECON](#) [ETRD](#) [KWBG](#) [KPAL](#) [IS](#)
SUBJECT: MUGHRABI GATE RAMP EXCAVATIONS AT HARAM
AL-SHARIF/TEMPLE MOUNT

CLASSIFIED BY: CONSUL GENERAL JAKE WALLES, PER REASONS 1.4 (B) AND (D)

11. (C) SUMMARY: EXCAVATIONS IN PREPARATION FOR THE CONSTRUCTION OF A NEW RAMP TO THE MUGHRABI GATE TO THE HARAM AL-SHARIF HAVE INFLAMED TENSIONS IN JERUSALEM'S OLD CITY. THE ADMINISTRATOR OF THE WAQF SAID ISRAELI POLICE HAVE RESTRICTED ACCESS TO THE HARAM AL-SHARIF/TEMPLE MOUNT FOR THE PAST TWO DAYS, AND THE HEAD OF THE ISLAMIC MOVEMENT IN ISRAEL WAS ARRESTED FEBRUARY 7 AS HE ATTEMPTED TO REACH THE EXCAVATION SITE. THE RAMP WILL REPLACE THE CURRENT WOODEN RAMP, WHICH WAS BUILT IN 2005 TO REPLACE A COLLAPSED EARTHEN RAMP. THE RAMP PROVIDES ACCESS TO THE HARAM AL SHARIF/TEMPLE MOUNT FOR ISRAELIS UNDER POLICE ESCORT AND FOR TOURISTS. END SUMMARY.

12. (C) TENSIONS HAVE INCREASED IN JERUSALEM'S OLD CITY AS EXCAVATIONS WERE BEGUN FEBRUARY 6 AT THE PLANNED LOCATION OF THE NEW MUGHRABI GATE RAMP. ACCORDING TO PRESS ACCOUNTS, 11 PEOPLE WERE ARRESTED FEBRUARY 6 AFTER PROTESTING THE EXCAVATIONS. ADNAN HUSSEINI, ADMINISTRATOR OF THE WAQF, TOLD POLOFF FEBRUARY 7 THAT 500 STUDENTS AND TEACHERS WERE PROHIBITED FROM ATTENDING THE WAQF-RUN SCHOOL LOCATED NEXT TO THE AL AQSA COMPOUND. SHEIKH RA'AD SALAH, HEAD OF THE ISLAMIC MOVEMENT IN ISRAEL, WAS DETAINED BY ISRAELI POLICE ON FEBRUARY 7 WHEN HE ATTEMPTED TO ENTER THE EXCAVATION AREA. HUSSEINI SAID HEAVY EARTH-MOVING EQUIPMENT WAS BROUGHT IN FEBRUARY 7 TO BEGIN THE EXCAVATIONS MORE QUICKLY, WHICH HE SAID ARE "DANGEROUS" AND "STRIPPING AWAY" THE CITY'S HISTORY. (COMMENT: ARCHAEOLOGICAL EXCAVATIONS RARELY USE LARGE EARTH-MOVING EQUIPMENT, AND THEY ARE ESPECIALLY INAPPROPRIATE IN AN AREA AS ARCHAEOLOGICALLY SENSITIVE AS THE OLD CITY. END COMMENT.)

13. (C) THE PREVIOUS MUGHRABI GATE RAMP WAS A 75 METER-LONG EARTHEN STRUCTURE CONSTRUCTED SHORTLY AFTER THE 1967 WAR, WHEN THE GOI DESTROYED ARAB HOMES IN THE MUGHRABI (MOROCCAN) QUARTER TO CONSTRUCT THE WESTERN WALL PLAZA. TORRENTIAL RAINS IN FEBRUARY OF 2004 LED TO THE COLLAPSE OF THE RAMP, WHICH LEADS TO THE ONLY GATE USED BY ISRAELIS (GENERALLY RIGHT-WING GROUPS) TO VISIT THE HARAM AL-SHARIF/TEMPLE MOUNT. THE GATE IS ALSO USED BY TOURISTS. A TEMPORARY WOODEN RAMP WAS CONSTRUCTED IN FEBRUARY 2005, AND THE CURRENT PLAN WOULD CONSTRUCT A PERMANENT REPLACEMENT FOR THAT RAMP. THE NEW RAMP, AT 200 METERS LONG, WOULD EXTEND FROM THE MUGHRABI GATE TO NEAR THE DUNG GATE. (COMMENT: PALESTINIANS FEAR A LARGER RAMP WILL FACILITATE ACCESS TO THE HARAM AL-SHARIF/TEMPLE MOUNT BY ISRAELIS AND BY ISRAELI SECURITY FORCES. END COMMENT.)

14. (C) DANNY SEIDEMANN, FOUNDER OF THE ISRAELI HUMAN RIGHTS NGO IR AMIN, TOLD POLOFF FEBRUARY 5 THAT THE BUILDING PERMIT FOR THE MUGHRABI GATE RAMP WAS GRANTED ILLEGALLY AND THAT HE

HAS WRITTEN TO ATTORNEY GENERAL MENACHEM MAZUZ ASKING THAT THE EXCAVATION AND CONSTRUCTION BE STOPPED. SEIDEMANN SAID THE INSPECTOR GENERAL OF THE JERUSALEM MUNICIPALITY HAS SAID NO SUCH A PERMIT CAN BE GRANTED WITHOUT A NEW ZONING PROCESS FOR THE AREA. SEIDEMANN SAID THIS ZONING WOULD REQUIRE PUBLIC REVIEW, WHICH HAS NOT OCCURRED. SEIDEMANN TOLD POLOFF FEBRUARY 7 THAT HE EXPECTED A DECISION FROM THE ATTORNEY GENERAL ON FEBRUARY 8.

15. (C) GIDON SULEIMAN, ARCHAEOLOGIST WITH THE ISRAELI ANTIQUITIES AUTHORITY, TOLD POLOFF JANUARY 26 THAT HE BELIEVES CONSTRUCTION OF THE NEW RAMP WOULD BE UNLIKELY TO HARM THE HARAM AL-SHARIF/TEMPLE MOUNT ITSELF, BUT COULD CAUSE SIGNIFICANT DAMAGE TO THE ARCHAEOLOGICAL PARK NEXT TO THE WESTERN WALL. ADDITIONALLY, HE PREDICTED THAT THE CONSTRUCTION OF A SIGNIFICANTLY LARGER RAMP COULD INFLAME TENSIONS IN THE AREA. HUSSEINI SAID THE DAMAGE TO CRUSADER-ERA TILES NEAR THE REMAINS OF THE OLD EARTHEN RAMP HAS ALREADY OCCURRED, AND "WHEN WE SEE THE BULLDOZER SMASHING TILES FROM THE MAMALUK PERIOD, IT IS LIKE THEY ARE SMASHING OUR HEADS."

WALLES